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THE FLOOD PROBLEM IN NORTHERN SANTA CLARA VALLEY

Santa Clara County Flood Control and Water District

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Prepared by the

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with the cooperation of

Corps of Engineers, U.S. Army
San Francisco District

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THE FLOOD PROBLEM IN NORTHERN SANTA CLARA VALLEY

Guadalupe River — Santa Clara at Lick Mill Road

1963 — Alviso

1963 — Fisher Creek at Bailey Avenue

1955 — Guadalupe River — San Jose at Julian Street

🟦	Area inundated by flood waters from a major flood on the Coyote and Guadalupe Watersheds
▨	Area inundated by flood waters from major floods on other large streams

Lands subject to upland sheet flooding, local drainage ponding and tidal water inundation are not shown

Nature, during the longer periods of low flows has developed relatively well defined stream channels. During flood flows these waters overtop the low flow channel to form natural floodways or floodplains. Man's farms and urban developments have encroached upon these floodplain areas and are subject to flooding from the larger though less frequent flood events. Flooding of the Santa Clara Valley is an **annual hazard** that could achieve calamitous proportions if a major flood event occurred. The more frequent, but relatively minor floods, such as that which occured in 1969 on the Coyote Creek, caused homeowners many hardships and damages in excess of $500,000. Large floods, such as that which occured in 1955, 1958 and 1963, inundated tens of thousands of acres and caused damage to homes, farms and public property that totaled in the millions of dollars.

SOLUTIONS

To combat these recurring damages, it is necessary to reestablish the natural capability of the valley floor to safely transmit flood waters to San Francisco Bay. In the light of today's community needs for open spaces, recreational activities as well as the enhancement of our natural resources, there are no unique solutions. Rather, there must be a blend of purposes. This results in solutions ranging from reservations for floodplains with appropriate zoning and flood insurance, to channelization with multipurpose enhancements such as illustrated below.

NATURAL FLOODWAY

FISHING IMPOUNDMENT

CHANNELIZED FLOODWAY

SANTA CLARA COUNTY
FLOOD CONTROL
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DONALD K. CURRLIN GENERAL MANAGER

Presentation
Regarding the Corps of Engineers

RESTUDY OF GUADALUPE RIVER AND ADJACENT STREAMS

Flooding of the Northern Santa Clara Valley from its two major streams - the Guadalupe River and Coyote Creek - is a serious problem with a long history. This problem is being compounded by the increasing development of homes, industries and improvements in the natural floodway.

Though great strides have been taken by the Santa Clara County Flood Control and Water District in recent years in developing flood protection projects in the area, the principal streams, Coyote Creek and the Guadalupe River, still require major capital expenditures if flood damages such as experienced as recently as 1955 and 1958 are to be averted. Today, if a major (one percent) flood occurred it would inundate more than 60 square miles of the valley floor, a great majority of which is highly urbanized. In the earlier floods, a large portion of the inundated areas was in agricultural use and while the damages were extensive, they were not felt by a great number of people. Still, damages on the Coyote and Guadalupe watersheds from the 1955 and 1958 floods exceeded two million dollars and created many individual hardships which cannot be quantified.

Projects that will safely convey the flood waters of these two principal streams to San Francisco Bay will cost in excess of 60 million dollars. Clearly, local funding would be hard pressed to provide for these improvements. In answer to local requests, the Corps of Engineers in 1963 began a study of the problem culminating in a "Report of Survey on the Guadalupe River and Adjacent Streams for Flood Control and Allied Purposes", dated January 1968. This report did not find a project in which the Federal government could participate under the economic guidelines then used. The report recommended floodplain management (zoning) to minimize losses from future floods.

As the area and population continued to grow and larger segments of the valley floor were urbanized, it became apparent that this earlier study should be reviewed to determine if conditions had changed in such a manner that a flood control project could be justified.

Accompanying this changing character of the Santa Clara Valley is a realization on the part of citizens, their governments and the Corps of Engineers that the process of formulation of proposed public works projects should involve more local participation. To this end, a maximum endeavor is being set forth to inform all citizens of the approaching study and to provide ready avenues for obtaining a maximum participation and input from the residents of Northern Santa Clara Valley during the course of the work.

The Corps of Engineers will hold a series of Public Meetings as the study progresses. The initial meeting will serve to initiate and generally explain the nature and extent of their studies. This meeting will also request cooperation and information from interested communities. Helpful information would include general plans, drainage and flooding problems, recreation and open space desires and special environmental considerations. Subsequent meetings will provide information to the communities on the alternatives being studied and seek further inputs from the citizens regarding the alternatives.

It is hoped that ongoing development and improvement projects such as the proposed National Wildlife Refuge, the Park of the Guadalupe, and the Coyote River Parkway as well as the need for additional parks and water-oriented recreation would be outlined in the presentation to the Corps of Engineers. These considerations should be developed and presented by each of the interested and affected communities. Similarly, opportunities for enhancement of environment by proposed floodway improvements should be cited by interested groups. It is desirable that these studies embrace as many opportunities for enhancement of these streams as possible. Water-oriented recreation and water quality are two areas which we expect to receive equal consideration with that of flood control.

In this regard, it may be possible with appropriate cost allocations for the District to make available water from the San Felipe Division of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's Central Valley Project to create a live stream in Coyote Creek. This possibility could greatly enhance the recreational aspects of a flood control project and provide for water quality improvement. This proposal would provide an integrated regional Federal water resources plan which could greatly improve our environment while providing needed water resource projects.

We should also bring to the attention of the Corps that inundation from these floods will impose additional hardships on many families who can ill-afford another burden.

It should be noted that the Public Meetings of the Corps of Engineers will not be the only opportunities for local input. There already has been formed a task force whose membership can be increased to include interested individuals and groups and whose duties will be broadened to include regular meetings and discussions with the Corps of Engineers during the course of their study.

The Corps of Engineers and the District are desirous of obtaining and including in this study the desires and interests of the local governments, interested groups and citizens. To begin this work, it is proposed that the initial Task Force be broadened to provide a Steering and Review Committee which will provide opportunities from interested cities and groups to maintain close liaison with the Corps' study. After you have had an opportunity to consider this aspect, we will contact you regarding representative members.

Although the Corps of Engineers' study area will embrace the entire north part of Santa Clara County, as well as a portion of Alameda County, we believe the study in northern Santa Clara County should be somewhat limited by the major local needs in order to assure that a concentrated study of these needs and their solutions will be made. We are suggesting that the study be principally directed at Coyote Creek and Guadalupe River and their major tributaries which appear to have major flooding problems, will be the most costly to solve, and will have the greatest potential for multi-use and, therefore, the greatest impact on the most people. We solicit your active endorsement and support of this study.

SANTA CLARA COUNTY FLOOD CONTROL
AND WATER DISTRICT
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